

VALIDATION AND APPROVALS PROCEDURE

Issue 13

Introduction

The aim of this procedure is to ensure the consistency of approach across curriculum and management areas and to optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of the approvals process. The procedure enables the consideration and, where appropriate, approval and validation of new and existing programmes of education and training.

Section One deals with programmes for delivery by University College Birmingham (UCB); Section Two, with those delivered by a third party provider through a franchise or licence agreement, and Section Three deals with the recognition of programmes of international institutions to be recognised for the purposes of allowing students to progress to appropriate programmes at UCB. Section Four deals with approvals for the delivery of UCB programmes by UCB staff, delivered other than at the UCB Campus locations.

Refer also to accompanying documents, the '*Collaborative Provision Procedure*' and the '*Progression Agreement Procedure*'.

Responsibilities

Members of the UCB Senior Management Team are responsible for approving the investigation of proposed new programmes of study.

The Curriculum and Quality Unit (CQ) is responsible for facilitating the development of the proposal; for identifying the validation requirements; for organising the validation event; for seeking ratification for the approved programme and for notifying all relevant bodies.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning) as a member of the Academic Board will normally Chair the Validation and Approvals Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Academic Board. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning) may, from time to time, delegate responsibilities for chairing the Committee to other senior managers who are independent of the programme(s) being considered.

The Collaborative Provision Working Group (CPWG) will meet to consider proposals for collaborative provision and progression agreements as a precursor to possible referral and recommendation to the Validation and Approvals Committee for final approval. These collaborative items will normally be considered within sections two and three of this procedure.

The Academic Board, through its Validation and Approvals Committee is responsible for approving any proposal for a new, amended or re-validated programme, either delivered at UCB or via a franchise or licence arrangement.

Procedure

Section 1: Programmes to be delivered by UCB:

A. New Programmes Procedure

A recommendation may be made from any source to a member of the senior management team (SMT) concerning ideas or proposals for a new programme of study. The SMT member will decide if the proposal is compatible with the aims of UCB and if it warrants further investigation, and may consult with other SMT members if necessary. If so, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Access, Participation and Student Experience) will determine the viability and feasibility of the proposed programme. This will entail a thorough consideration of the proposed programme, to include its potential in terms of community and industry demand; student progression opportunities; financial viability and resource availability.

The Curriculum and Quality Unit (CQ) will establish the awarding body requirements for the proposal and inform the relevant external bodies of the validation intention, where necessary¹. CQ will arrange for the creation of the relevant approval documentation and will ensure that all validation requirements have been addressed. The *Programme Specification Form Completion Guide and the Programme Specification Form* prescribe the format and content of HE programme submissions, and the requirements of individual awarding bodies for FE programme approval will be met through the use of their standard systems.

For all programmes, including those that UCB has discretion to design and develop², CQ will facilitate a meeting of the Validation and Approvals Committee. The membership of the Committee for a new programme of study will comprise the Chair (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning) or nominee); the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Access, Participation and Student Experience); the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Finance); an Executive Dean of School; the Executive Director Engagement, Employability and E-Resources; the Director of Quality Systems; the Assistant Dean Academic Quality Enhancement in HE; the Deputy Director Marketing; the Deputy Director Admissions; an Officer of the Student Guild; and an external representative with appropriate academic and/or vocational experience. Nominees may be accepted for membership if approved by the Officer for the event. Nominees will be briefed on their responsibilities as a committee member, the protocol of the event itself and the importance of ensuring academic rigour and integrity.

A representative from CQ will Officer validation events.

The Validation and Approvals Committee will review the submission documentation. A nominated member of staff and representatives from the teaching team will normally present the rationale for the new programme. The meeting will normally observe the following protocols:

¹ The University of Birmingham is the only awarding body customarily informed of new programme intention at the time of writing of this procedure.

² Currently awards of the University of Birmingham

- CQ will set the date of the validation event.
- CQ will organise and carry out the selection and briefing of the Committee.
- CQ will distribute copies of any completed submission documents to Committee members at least five days before the event.
- The Officer to the Committee will record the outcomes and facilitate the organisation and smooth running of the event. The Officer will act as liaison between the Committee and the Development Team representatives ensuring that the necessary Committee requests are fulfilled.

The format of the Validation and Approvals Committee event will include an initial presentation or discussion of the rationale for the new programme, its design and delivery strategies, and arrangements for student support and quality assurance by representatives of the Development Team. This will be followed by questions from the Committee to the Development Team and a period of private reflection and discussion by the Committee to review progress or to agree the outcome. The Committee will be aided in their questioning by the *Validation and Approvals Committee Guidelines* document.

The meeting will conclude with an identification by the Chair, of the Committee's decision. This may specify **conditions** to the approval of the new programme, which are binding and must be addressed before commencement of the programme, and/or **recommendations**, which are not binding but are made in good faith in the interests of quality enhancement.

The Curriculum and Quality Unit will monitor and record that the specified conditions and/or recommendations have been addressed.

B. Programme Re-validation Procedure

CQ will determine awarding body regulations with regard to the re-validation of approved programmes of study and will inform programme management of the requirements for gaining a further period of programme approval. The re-validation process is an opportunity to review the design, content and relevance of an established programme. Re-validation will often be part of the UCB Periodic Review process, whereby programmes review their philosophy, relevance and objectives every five years ensuring academic rigour and currency (refer to the *Periodic Review Procedure*).

Re-validation will consider the currency of the programme in terms of industry relevance, community and student demand, student satisfaction and external verifier/moderator/examiner reports. Progression opportunities, curricula content, delivery methods and assessment strategies will be reviewed where necessary³.

An initial review may be undertaken by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Access, Participation and Student Experience). If there appears to be a prima facie case for re-validation, CQ will facilitate a meeting of the Validation and Approvals Committee, and arrange for the necessary information to be gathered for presentation.

The membership of the Committee for a re-validation event will be as stated in section A; New Programme Procedure.

The re-validation meeting will take a form similar to that for new programme approvals. However, where re-validation is the result of the programme periodic review, the format will be will also include the testing of the periodic review evaluation report outcomes in a Validation and Approvals Committee meeting prior to the revalidation meeting taking place (Refer to the *Periodic Review Procedure*).

³ Such consideration MUST be undertaken for awards at any HE level. For FE programmes, the requirements of individual awarding bodies may require this, or similar.

C. Programme Amendment

The Validation and Approvals Committee must approve any substantial changes to the delivery, structure, or aims and objectives of a programme, or part of a programme. Although the Module Review Panel may approve minor changes, they must still be ratified at a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

CQ will establish if the nature of the proposed change requires approval by the Validation and Approvals Committee. Any validation meeting will take a form similar to that for new programme approvals.

Guidelines on programme amendment

a. The following types of changes to programmes **MUST** be approved by the Validations and Approvals Committee and, if a University of Birmingham award, be reported to the Accreditation Committee:

- Changes in structure of a year (e.g., the introduction of options).
- Changes in assessment philosophy.
- Changes in Learning Outcomes or content which substantially affect the nature of the module.
- Replacement of one module with another.
- Renaming of a module.

A justification for the change and supporting documentation should be presented to the Committee with the proposal for change.

b. The following types of changes to a programme **DO NOT** need to be presented to the Validations and Approvals sub-committee for approval:

- Changes to booklists/references
- Changes to content that does not substantially affect the nature or aims of the module.

However, these changes must first be discussed with the Curriculum and Quality Unit, in order that it can be established that the changes do not need the involvement of the Validations and Approvals Committee, and that guidance on fit with benchmark statements can be provided.

The membership of the Committee for the consideration of a programme amendment will be as stated in section A; New Programme Procedure.

Section 2: Collaborative Agreements

All collaborative arrangements with partner colleges, whereby programmes approved for delivery at UCB are delivered by a third party provider under a franchise, licence or other contractual arrangement, must be initially considered by the Collaborative Provision Working Group (CPWG). If the CPWG are in agreement that the proposal has merit and meets the requirements for acceptable evidence that there is minimal risk to academic standards and quality of provision can be ascertained and is secure, the proposal will be forwarded for consideration and approval by the Validation and Approvals Committee.

Proposals for collaborative arrangements will be considered by the Collaborative Provision Working Group and if compatible with the aims of UCB, an investigation into the viability of the arrangement will be conducted. This will include the requirement to visit the third party provider to assess the potential for delivering the proposed programme(s) at a standard of quality equivalent to the programme or similar programme at UCB.

Any validation meeting will take a form similar to that for new programme approvals. The membership of the Committee for the consideration of a collaborative agreement will be as stated in section A. New Programme Procedure.

A separate *Collaborative Provision Procedure* provides further detail on this.

Section 3: Progression Agreements

From time to time, UCB is requested by overseas institutions to enter into a progression agreement, whereby one or more of its qualifications are recognised by UCB for the purposes of allowing students to progress to appropriate programmes at UCB at a certain academic level or stage. The recognition of specific programmes delivered by an overseas institution will be approved and also re-validated by the Validation and Approvals Committee.

The Collaborative Provision Working Group will arrange for a suitable member of staff to evaluate the programme proposed for recognition. This evaluation will consider:

- the content and level of the programme (using all means necessary to establish the level equivalence with the UK qualification framework);
- the standards achieved by students following the programme (where known);
- information on the institution, gathered during a visit, or from reliable sources (such as British Council offices);
- the extent to which the programme matches the content and level of particular programmes at UCB.

CQ will facilitate the meeting of the Validation and Approvals Committee. The membership of the Committee for the consideration of a progression agreement will be as stated in section A. New Programme Procedure.

A separate '*Progression Agreement Procedure*' provides further detail on this.

Section 4: Off-site delivery

Where the delivery of a UCB programme is proposed at premises or facilities not owned by UCB or for which UCB has no responsibility for upkeep and maintenance, CQ will facilitate an evaluation of the suitability of those premises, to include a site visit.

CQ will facilitate the meeting of the Validation and Approvals Committee. The minimum membership of the Committee for the consideration of a proposal for off-site delivery will be as determined by the CQ Officer. External representatives will not normally be required. Nominees may be accepted for membership if approved by the Officer for the event. Nominees will be briefed on their responsibilities as a committee member, the protocol of the event itself and the importance of ensuring academic rigour and integrity.

The following aspects of the premises will be considered:

- The health and safety arrangements at the facility
- The provision of physical resources (to support disability and programme delivery for example)
- The design and layout of the learning environment
- The provision of specialist resources and equipment
- The availability of learning support

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